UNITED
NATIONS

DP

Governing Council
of the
United Nations
Development Programme

Distr.
GENERAL

DP/1992/13
22 January 1992

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Special session
10-14 February 1992, New York
Item 6 of the provisional agenda

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT

Regional consultations on the Human Development Report

Report of the Administrator

Summary

The present report has been prepared pursuant to paragraphs 1 and 2 of Governing Council decision 91/6 of 25 June 1991 and General Assembly resolution 46/218 of 20 December 1991.

The report summarizes the outcome of the regional consultations held in New York during the autumn of 1991 with the participation of Governments in order to review the outline of the Human Development Report 1992 and to ensure that specific development concerns and priorities, especially those of developing countries, are taken into consideration as appropriate in the preparation of the Human Development Report 1992 and future work of the Administrator on the reports.

I. LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND

1. Paragraph 1 of Governing Council decision 91/6 of 25 June 1991 requests the Administrator to convene regional consultations in New York, with the participation of Governments, to be completed by 30 November 1991, in order that specific development concerns and priorities, especially those of developing countries, are taken into consideration, as appropriate, in the preparation of the next report on human development and future work of the Administrator on the report.

2. In paragraph 2 of decision 91/6, the Governing Council reiterates its request to the Administrator to inform the Council of the outcome of these consultations at its thirty-ninth session (1992) in order to facilitate and decide on future work in the area of human development and to take into full consideration the views expressed by delegations on this issue during the deliberations at the thirty-eighth session of the Council.

3. Subsequently, in its resolution 46/218 of 20 December 1991, the General Assembly took note of the intention of the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme to inform the Governing Council of the Programme at its special session in February 1992 of the outcome of the regional consultations.

4. The present report has been prepared pursuant to these legislative mandates.

II. THE CONSULTATIVE PROCESS

5. The regional consultations on the Human Development Report 1992 took place during the period of 19 September to 16 October 1991. They consisted of a plenary presentation of the outline of the 1992 Report and a series of meetings with six regional groups: African States, Arab States, Asian States, Eastern European States, Latin American and Caribbean States and Western European and Other States.

6. In addition, informal consultations were held on 20 November 1991 on issues of human freedom and development. Also, present at this meeting for discussions with Member States was a group of international human rights experts who had been invited by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for a two-day meeting prior to the 20 November consultations to review and comment on the preparatory work on political freedom to be included in the 1992 Report.

7. The following sections summarize the discussions of the September/October meetings as well as those of the 20 November meeting.

III. SUMMARY OF THE DEBATE

A. Presentation of the outline of the Human Development Report 1992

8. At the opening plenary session of the series of regional consultations, UNDP introduced the outline of the Human Development Report 1992, which had been circulated to all member States of the Programme in advance of the regional consultations. It was stated that while the 1990 and 1991 Reports had focused on the responsibility of developing countries to promote improved human development, the 1992 Report was intended to complement this discussion by placing the emphasis on the international dimensions of human development.

9. The Human Development Report 1992 will address four main questions, namely:

(a) To what extent has international economic growth and the expansion of global income and wealth filtered down to poor nations and poor people?

(b) Do the international markets for capital, goods and services, and labour function efficiently and what is their human development impact?

(c) What is the contribution human development - or, put differently, people themselves - can make to improving a country's international economic competitiveness?

(d) Is there a need for a reform of global governance to ensure that international markets can function more efficiently and human development is promoted more effectively?

10. In addition to the discussion on these four questions, the 1992 Report is also intended to continue the conceptual and methodological debate on human development - its analysis, measurement, planning and management - and to present updated tables on human development indicators.

11. The 1992 Report will attempt to clarify some of the misunderstandings that at times surrounded the concept of human development. The four major points that need clarification are the following:

(a) The human development concept does not ignore economic growth. To the contrary, it emphasizes that improvements in human development levels cannot be sustained without continuous injections of economic growth;

(b) The human development concept is not just about basic needs satisfaction. Human development is a continuing process which also covers issues such as higher levels of learning and strengthening national capacity in the areas of science and technology;

(c) The human development concept is not just about the formation of human capabilities (e.g., education, health, or nutrition). It is also about the utilization of human capabilities (e.g., access to productive work and employment);

(d) The human development concept is not an abstract, theoretical concept. It can be made operational. More than 20 countries have already requested UNDP assistance in formulating their own comprehensive human development strategies.

B. Comments and responses

1. Outline of the Human Development Report 1992

12. Most delegations welcomed the focus of the 1992 Report. Many representatives thought that this focus was a necessary complement to the strong domestic-policy orientation of the first two Human Development Reports. Some delegations called it a fair complement and expressed their preparedness to enter into a policy dialogue on how changes in the international economic environment could help bring about improved human development in developing countries.

13. Many delegations suggested that the analysis of the international dimensions of human development be the heart of the 1992 Report. Some delegations proposed the shortening of other sections to allow a more in-depth discussion on international issues. The 1992 Report would, for example, not have to be too elaborate on the conceptual and methodological issues. Some delegations also proposed that there might not be a need for a separate chapter on environmental issues, given the considerable attention being devoted to this subject inside and outside the United Nations system in preparation for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED).

14. A number of delegates also suggested that the 1992 Report should avoid the temptation of dealing with too many issues. The more focused, well researched and documented its discussion, the more valuable would it be to policy makers and development professionals. Several representatives suggested that the 1992 Report should be analytical in nature so as to identify effective policy responses. For example, it should not only describe the distribution of global economic opportunities but also aim at identifying the reasons for existing international inequities. In the same vein, international migration should be traced back to its root causes - the lack of development in developing countries. Disparities in national capacity in the field of science and technology and issues of transfer of technology were also considered to be important in explaining widening disparities between rich and poor nations. Some delegations stressed that in addition to examining these international dimensions of human development, UNDP should give thought to what technical cooperation could do in order to help create an international environment more conducive to accelerated growth and human development in

developing countries. Several speakers referred to recent debates of United Nations entities, in particular the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, on issues of direct relevance to the 1992 Report, such as global economic development, debt and trade. They stressed that the 1992 Report should take these debates into account and that its analysis should aim at facilitating the implementation of the relevant resolutions of these bodies. In its response to these and other comments on the outline of the 1992 Report, UNDP indicated that these points will be taker into account, as appropriate, in the Human Development Report 1992.

2. The potential uses of the Human Development Reports and their policy messages

15. Many delegations showed considerable interest in the operational activities which UNDP is supporting as a follow-up to the 1990 and 1991 Reports and felt that the information about these had demonstrated to them the practical usefulness of the Reports.

16. However, major concern was expressed by some developing countries about the use that donors could make of some of the indices presented in the Reports for purposes of aid conditionality. Reference was made, for example, to the ratio between the combined public spending on education and health and government spending on the military. The Human Freedom Index (HFI) contained in the 1991 Report was also mentioned in this connection.

17. While it is not possible to capture the full range of issues raised by various delegations during the course of the regional consultations, some of the additional comments were: (a) Several delegations underlined that there could not be a standard policy approach to human development but that strategies for more people-oriented development must be country- and region-specific. Accordingly, human development priorities might differ from country to country, and within countries, even from one population group to another; (b) Human development is a concern that applies not only to developing countries. It applies equally to industrialized countries, although the specific nature of the problems and challenges are different; (c) More information is needed on the relationship, if any, between human development and economic growth as well as between promoting basic human development and higher levels of human development; (d) Human Development Reports should be based on the most up-to-date statistics available; and (e) In the preparation of the Reports, UNDP should draw on the work done by other United Nations specialized agencies and ensure full collaboration with them.

18. In conclusion, there was general agreement on the outline of the Human Development Report 1992. UNDP assured the members of the Governing Council that their comments would be taken fully into account while preparing the final 1992 Report.

C. Presentation of the work on political freedom and human development

19. UNDP stressed three main points concerning the work on political freedom:

(a) UNDP agreed with many delegations, that the HFI, as presented in the 1991 Report, had serious shortcomings. Although the data for the HFI had been taken from an existing study, which was probably the most comprehensive and systematic available, there were problems. The HFI had cultural biases which had influenced not only the selection of the indicators included but also the interpretation of the practical meaning of some universal rights. Its data sources and methods of weighting and ranking lacked transparency. The information used was often outdated. And too many indicators were crowded into the HFI without any proper justification for each one of them;

(b) In order to refine the analysis of the relationship between political freedom and development, further background studies, based on available data, have been undertaken;

(c) In carrying out the studies mentioned in (b), the comments raised by member States at the thirty-eighth session of the Governing Council (1991) were taken fully into account. In particular, efforts were made to ensure the following: (a) a review of all available human rights instruments, including regional charters, in order to identify globally shared goals and objectives; (b) the selection of a limited number of universally accepted key indicators which describe the processes that guarantee human rights and political participation rather than the contents of different forms of freedoms; (c) the in-depth examination of the historical relationships between political freedom and development; (d) a more detailed study of the question of whether freedom is at all measurable; (e) the involvement of experts from different regions; and (f) that the information used is fully up to date and drawn from reliable sources.

20. At the informal consultations on 20 November, delegations were informed that the expert group meeting on human freedom and development had, in particular, been asked to examine three main questions: (a) what is the link between political freedom and development? (b) can freedom be measured? and (c) which indicators should be used? The substance of their deliberations on these issues, as presented at the 20 November meeting, is summarized below.

Relation between freedom and development

21. Most of the experts recognized a link between freedom and development although the two do not always move in step.

22. It was, of course, important to state what precisely is meant by development in this context. If development were to be equated with economic growth, one could find historical examples showing that growth can be achieved even during periods of lack of political freedom. However, if development meant human development - development in which people participate - it was

difficult to envisage that development could progress without guarantee of human rights and political freedom.

Measuring political freedom

23. While a number of the experts took the position that political freedom escapes all attempts at quantification and measurement, others held the view that there could be merit in devising indicators and indices of freedom. However, several experts urged that the conceptual and methodological difficulties should not be underestimated. Some said they preferred to begin with measuring individual clusters or dimensions of political freedom before moving on to aggregation and the construction of a composite index.

24. There was also a discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of ranking countries according to an index of human freedom - a discussion which remained inconclusive. Some experts preferred a more qualitative analysis of human rights and political freedom. Others held the view that quantification and ranking would facilitate a more comprehensive review of the issues involved, in particular the integration of human rights and freedom issues with other developmental concerns that had already been quantified, such as economic growth.

Clusters of political freedom

25. Political freedom, most experts agreed, was a complex phenomenon composed of a number of dimensions of freedom. Several experts endorsed a four-cluster proposal (which was comprised of political participation, rule of law, freedom of expression, and equality before the law). However, they felt that a revised proposal submitted by one of the experts at the brainstorming meeting itself might be preferable. The proposal consisted of:

(a) Physical integrity and safety of a person;

(b) Rule of law;

(c) Freedom of expression, assembly, and association;

(d) Political participation; and

(e) Equality before the law.

26. In addition, some experts said they favoured measuring not only State violations but also non-State violations, including in the assessment not only modern systems of political participation but also traditional forms. They also considered the gradual expansion of the type of freedom covered to include, for example, collective rights, or rights of children and immigrants. Some experts preferred the establishment of a hierarchy of rights, with physical integrity and personal safety receiving the greatest weight.

D. Comments and responses

27. The advisability of including a political freedom index in the Human Development Report 1992 was the subject of extensive discussion in the informal consultations of the Governing Council held on 20 November 1991 and subsequently in the Second Committee of the General Assembly in the context of its consideration of operational activities.

28. Some delegations argued against including a political freedom index on the following grounds:

(a) No conclusive link can be established between freedom and development, either historically or in recent times;

(b) There is no universally agreed definition of freedom: notions of freedom are often country-specific and culturally determined;

(c) Freedom from hunger and the right to work are just as important in poor countries, if not more important than the freedom to vote;

(d) Freedom is too valuable a concept to be reduced to a number: it should be discussed qualitatively, not measured quantitively;

(e) Donors may inappropriately use an index of freedom to establish a formal link between aid and human rights;

(f) UNDP has no mandate to measure freedom: such work should be done by the United Nations Centre for Human Rights and other concerned agencies;

(g) An implicit agreement was reached at the thirty-eighth session of the Governing Council that any further work on the human freedom index will be abandoned.

29. Other delegations argued in favour of including a political freedom index in the Human Development Report 1992 on the following grounds:

(a) The concept of human development is incomplete without the inclusion of freedom;

(b) While cultural values differ and stages of development change, there are certain concepts of freedom that are universally agreed upon as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related treaties;

(c) UNDP does not require a separate mandate to discuss issues of freedom: its mandate arises from the fact that freedom is an integral part of human development.

30. In response, UNDP made the following main points:

(a) It is true that freedom and development have not always marched in step historically - neither in the industrialized countries nor in the developing countries. It is also true that the causality between freedom and development is not firmly established - whether freedom leads to development or development leads to freedom. These are issues that invite further study. We need not agree that freedom and development always move together. None the less, freedom is an essential part of the concept of human development, the basic objective of which is to enlarge the range of peoples' choices. Any study of human development is, therefore, incomplete without a corresponding study of human freedom - irrespective of whether the two do, or do not, move in step over various periods of time;

(b) There is no universally agreed definition of freedom. However, by consulting international and regional charters as well as national constitutions it is possible to establish a consensus on certain common values. Five clusters of freedom (physical integrity and safety of a person, rule of law, freedom of expression, political participation, and equality of opportunity) reflect values which are common to all of these charters. Such a methodology is a complete departure from that used in 1991 and is professionally defensible;

(c) Economic and social rights are as important as political rights in developing countries. Both should be analysed and can be included in one composite index or measured in several indices which can then be integrated. The achievements of economic and social rights are measured in the Human Development Index (HDI). It is proposed to measure political rights in the Political Freedom Index (PFI). This methodology allows a comparison of the two indices to see whether there are any linkages. It also allows a merger of the two indices to study the overall human development status. This methodology is superior to a composite index, which implicitly assumes that there is a complete correlation between developmental and political rights;

(d) Freedom is difficult to measure in any precise fashion, however sophisticated. But this is also true of the measures of income or of human development. It is only a matter of degree. Any measure of freedom will be an approximation and the preparation of an index on this subject will be a continuing process, involving refinements over time;

(e) Indices of this type are intended to provide the basis for informed policy dialogue, not aid conditionality. The growth of democracy in the 1980s and early 1990s was not not the result of any external conditionality;

(f) UNDP is concerned with improvements in peoples' lives. Although increase in material production may sometimes be divorced from political freedom, the improvement of human lives can never be divorced from such freedom. As stated in the first Human Development Report 1990 "Human development is incomplete without human freedom ... Any index of human development should therefore give adequate weight to a society's human freedom

in pursuit of material and social goals ...". Thus, the presentation of a Human Freedom Index in the 1991 Report was fully consistent with this understanding of human development. The problems with the 1991 Human Freedom Index have been extensively discussed and it has now been abandoned. UNDP has subsequently undertaken extensive professional work in collaboration with the United Nations Centre for Human Rights;

(g) Finally, in considering the Human Development Reports, there is the overriding concern to safeguard professional integrity and independence. It is natural that there will not be complete agreement on all the views expressed in the Human Development Reports. They will always be subject to critical professional scrutiny, thereby validating them as the basis for up-to-date policy dialogue. They should be judged on these terms.